

Marcia C. “Marcy” Kaptur

1946–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

DEMOCRAT FROM OHIO

1983–



Image courtesy of the Member

AS THE DEAN OF DEMOCRATIC WOMEN IN THE HOUSE, Marcy Kaptur has been a proponent of trade reform to enhance the economy of her coastal Ohio district and others like it. Kaptur was elected as the youngest woman to serve on the prestigious Appropriations Committee, where she is now the senior woman from either party. Her seat offers her a forum for speaking out on many issues from the economy, defense, and foreign affairs to energy independence. Further, Kaptur is a leading student of women’s contributions to House history and she authored the original legislation to create a World War II Memorial on the National Mall.

Marcia Carolyn “Marcy” Kaptur was born on June 17, 1946, in Toledo, Ohio, to Stephen and Anastasia Kaptur. She and her brother, Stephen, were raised in that working-class town. Her Polish-American family owned and operated a corner market and her parents worked in auto factories. Kaptur graduated from St. Ursula Academy High School in 1964 and, in 1968, as a beneficiary of scholarships, received a B.A. in history with honors from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She earned a master’s degree in urban planning from the University of Michigan in 1974, and later conducted post graduate studies in new towns and development finance at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Manchester in England. From 1969 to 1975, Kaptur served as an urban planner on the Toledo-Lucas County plan commissions. For two years she directed planning for the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs. In 1977, Kaptur was appointed by the James Earl “Jimmy” Carter administration as the assistant director for urban affairs on the President’s domestic policy staff. There, she acted as a liaison for 17 housing and neighborhood revitalization bills that passed Congress.¹

Kaptur challenged Ohio Republican incumbent Ed Weber in 1982 for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and was elected as the first female to represent that district, just two years after Weber’s own victory over 13-term incumbent Thomas Ashley. She is one of only 13 women to have defeated a male incumbent. The Ohio district, including Toledo, boasted a primarily blue-collar constituency to whom Kaptur appealed in her grassroots campaign. Arguing that the Toledo

economy had plummeted during the first two years of the Ronald W. Reagan administration, Kaptur won with 58 percent of the vote in a race which captured national attention. In her subsequent 12 re-election campaigns, Kaptur won by two-to-one margins or better.²

During the 98th Congress (1983–1985), Kaptur received assignments on two committees: Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs; and Veterans' Affairs. She left Veterans' Affairs for a seat on the Budget Committee in the 101st Congress (1989–1991). Later in that Congress, she resigned her previous assignments after securing a seat on the Appropriations Committee. In the 109th Congress (2005–2007), with 22 years' seniority, Kaptur became the first Democratic woman to be elected to the Subcommittee on Defense and continued to serve on the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies Appropriations.

From the start of her House career, Kaptur's greatest cause has been promoting trade practices more beneficial to her district and similar regions. In the 1970s and 1980s, Toledo began a decline in manufacturing and agricultural jobs, and in the iron and coal trade. Kaptur's Appropriations seat has given her a prominent perch from which to act as a leading opponent of all the major free trade initiatives of the 1990s and the early 2000s. In 1993, Kaptur was a critic of the North American Free Trade Agreement, arguing that it favored transnational corporate interests and would cost Ohio more than 100,000 jobs. She also opposed the 1994 law that established the World Trade Organization, the 2000 approval of permanent normal trade relations for China, and the 2002 legislation which granted the executive "fast track" authority to broker trade agreements that Congress could not amend.³

Representative Kaptur has steered millions of federal dollars into economic and community improvement projects in northern Ohio, including funding for the New Maumee River Crossing, the largest transportation project in state history. She also has been attuned to her constituents' agricultural interests. Ohio's two largest flower-producing counties are in Kaptur's district, as well as numerous greenhouse, vegetable, feed grain, animal, and sugar beet farmers.⁴

In 1996, Congresswoman Kaptur authored *Women of Congress: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey*, featuring biographical profiles of former Congresswomen.⁵ Kaptur also has been a leader in bringing to the Capitol more art commemorating women and minorities. She is a recipient of the Ellis Island Award and is the only woman to have received the Veterans of Foreign Wars Americanism Award.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Marcy Kaptur," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

Kaptur, Marcy. *Women of Congress: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey*. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1996).

NOTES

- 1 "Official Biography of Marcy Kaptur," <http://www.house.gov/Kaptur/library/biography.aspx> (accessed 12 September 2002).
- 2 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.
- 3 "Rep. Marcy Kaptur," *CQ Weekly*, 28 December 2002: 49–50; *Almanac of American Politics*, 2002 (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Inc., 2001): 1213–1214; *Politics in America*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 799–800.
- 4 "Rep. Marcy Kaptur."
- 5 Marcy Kaptur, *Women of Congress: A Twentieth-Century Odyssey* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1996): ix.